

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation  
November 9, 2006

**FORT MASON CENTER INTERPRETIVE PROGRAM PLAN**

File No. 06-089  
Project Manager: Neal Fishman/Carol Arnold

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:** Consideration and possible authorization to disburse up to \$25,000 to the Fort Mason Foundation to prepare an interpretive plan for the Ft. Mason Center.

**LOCATION:** The Fort Mason Center is located at the western edge of Fort Mason on the southwestern shoreline of San Francisco Bay east of the Golden Gate Bridge and Crissy Field. The main entrance is at the intersection of Marina Boulevard and Buchanan Street, in the Marina district of San Francisco (Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map).

**PROGRAM CATEGORY:** Urban Waterfronts

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**EXHIBITS**

- Exhibit 1: Project Location and Site Map
- Exhibit 2: Photographs
- Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

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**RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:**

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following resolution pursuant to Sections 31300, *et seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes disbursement of an amount not to exceed twenty-five thousand dollars (\$25,000) to the Fort Mason Foundation to prepare a plan for the interpretation of the cultural history of the Fort Mason Center site, subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of any Conservancy funds, the Association shall submit for review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy (“Executive Officer”), a budget, schedule, final designs and plans, and any contractors and subcontractors to be employed.
2. The Fort Mason Foundation shall identify the Coastal Conservancy as a sponsor of the Fort Mason Center Interpretive Program on signs and/or interpretive displays, educational materials and media publications, in a manner that shall be approved by the Executive Officer of the Conservancy.”

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Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adopt the following findings:

“Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed project is consistent with Chapter 7 (regarding urban waterfronts) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code.
2. The proposed project is consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy of January 24, 2001.
3. The Fort Mason Foundation is a private nonprofit organization existing under Section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Code, and whose purposes are consistent with Division 21 of the California Public Resources Code.”

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**PROJECT SUMMARY:**

This project will result in the completion of a plan by the Fort Mason Foundation (Foundation) to develop an interpretive program for the 13-acre Fort Mason Center site along the southwestern Bay front in San Francisco. The interpretive program will be designed to enhance public enjoyment and increase visitor use of the Fort Mason Center, which currently attracts approximately 1.6 million people each year.

Occupied by Ohlone Indians for many years, the Bay shoreline where the Fort Mason Center is located was later occupied by Spanish troops defending San Francisco Bay. In use for military purposes for over 200 years, the site became part of the Fort Mason U.S. military base and was a major point of embarkation for American soldiers in the Pacific during World War II and the Korean War. Since 1976, the Fort Mason Center has become the home of nearly three-dozen creative and/or philanthropic nonprofit organizations in a highly successful conversion from military to civilian uses. The Center houses the famous Green’s vegetarian restaurant, as well as performance spaces and a large conference center. Often used for large events, it is the home of the Arts of Pacific Asia Show, the Tribal & Textile Arts show, the Contemporary Crafts Market, Photo SF and the Pacific Orchid Exposition.

The plan to develop the Fort Mason Center interpretive program will be carried out in three stages. Overseen by a creative team of architects, artists, graphic and interpretive designers and historians, the first stage will involve archival research, oral interviews and site analyses and a public workshop to solicit ideas from the community. A draft conceptual plan will outline themes and approaches for interpreting and relating the Fort Mason Center’s varied cultural history and when completed will be presented to the public for additional community input.

The second stage will include site-specific designs for interpretive displays, as well as a more detailed location plan, drawings, written narrative, and implementation budget. The third stage will produce a final conceptual design, including colored drawings or computer generated color images and three-dimensional models that accurately reflect interpretive elements. The final conceptual plan will describe installation methods, colors and materials, construction methods, and costs and will be presented to the community and press at a public meeting and press conference.

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The Foundation expects that the interpretive features will present a wide range of individual stories which, when combined, will relate a complex, multi-faceted history of the transformation over time of an ancient Ohlone settlement into the multicultural urban shoreline it is today.

The Fort Mason Foundation was incorporated in 1976 to oversee the Fort Mason Center in partnership with the National Park Service. It functions as a manager of the Center, and recently signed a 60-year lease with the Park Service, the longest lease ever offered by the Park Service. In the future, the Foundation plans to undertake restoration and preservation projects at various locations within Fort Mason Center.

**Site Description:** Situated on 13 waterfront acres with a stunning view of San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, the Marin Headlands and parts of the East Bay, lower Fort Mason, now known as Fort Mason Center, is a complex of warehouses and piers, built between 1910 and 1914 to supply Army bases across the Pacific. The Fort Mason Center lies within the site of the former Fort Mason U.S. military base and is part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area.

The Fort Mason Center houses three piers and nine Mission Revival buildings, totaling 330,000 square feet. The red-tiled roofs and white stucco facades evoke Spanish Colonial architecture on a grand scale. The Center currently services the San Francisco community as a cultural center and office space for non-profit organizations ranging from theaters and ethnic museums to art galleries and environmental advocacy groups. (Exhibit 2: Photographs)

Designated a National Historic Landmark, Fort Mason Center is a lively, ever-changing reflection of the dynamic Bay Area community. It provides visitors with a unique opportunity to experience a diverse and eclectic mix of culture, education and recreation in an urban park environment.

**Project History:** For the native Ohlone, the current site of the Fort Mason Center was used as a fishing ground, an example of their sacred home's natural bounty. Following the arrival of the Spanish explorers, the site was used to defend one of their farthest outposts of the Spanish empire. In the late 19th century, it served as a battleground between adventurous settlers seeking land and a federal government determined to evict squatters and validate the rule of law in the west. The site was part of what became the Fort Mason U.S. military base and was used as the main point of embarkation for the Pacific Coast, playing a key role in several wars including the Spanish-American War, World War II and the Korean War.

In 1972, Congress created the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), an urban park with several thousand acres of San Francisco shoreline. Fort Mason, including the Fort Mason Center, was abandoned for military purposes and incorporated into the park. A collection of grassroots organizers transformed the Fort Mason Center into a model of creative reuse, providing a home for diverse and influential non-profit organizations.

Following a recent summer-long visioning process that involved more than 100 artists, producers, corporate executives, community leaders, neighbors, and many representatives of the Fort Mason Center's nonprofit resident organizations, the Fort Mason History Project emerged as an instrument for collecting, archiving, interpreting and presenting the unique history of Fort Mason. Led by cultural historian and planner Donna Graves — noted for her work developing the Rosie the Riveter/WWII Home Front National Historical Park — the idea to develop an

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interpretive program for Fort Mason Center was conceived, resulting in outreach to the public and a search for funding, including this grant request.

**PROJECT FINANCING:**

Coastal Conservancy	\$ 25,000
Other Sources:	
California Cultural and Historic Endowment, Water & Elise Hass Fund, Individual Donors:	175,000
<b>Total Project Costs:</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>

The expected source of funds for this project is the 06/07 appropriation to the Conservancy from the California Environmental License Plate Fund. The Environmental License Plate Fund account may be used for the purposes of coastal natural resource and enhancement projects, as well as other projects consistent with Division 21 of the Public Resources Code (Vehicle Code Section 5067(c)(1)(B)). As discussed in detail below, the project is consistent with Chapter 7 (Sections 31300-31315) of Division 21, Public Resources Code.

**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:**

This project is consistent with Chapter 7 (regarding urban waterfront projects) of Division 21 of the Public Resources Code, in the following respects:

Under Section 31307, the Conservancy may award grants to public agencies and nonprofit organizations for the restoration of urban waterfront areas. The Fort Mason Center Interpretive Program will enhance the urban shoreline of San Francisco by providing interpretive amenities to increase visitor use and enjoyment of the Fort Mason Center.

Under Section 31308, the Conservancy may provide up to the total cost of any urban waterfront project after evaluating the total amount of funding available for urban waterfront projects, the fiscal resources of the applicant, the urgency of the project relative to other eligible urban waterfront projects, the degree to which the project meets the objectives set forth in Section 31305, and the application of other factors prescribed by the Conservancy for the purpose of determining project eligibility and priority. As described in the "Project Funding" section, Conservancy funds are matched seven to one with private, local funding.

As identified in Section 31308, this project is also consistent with Section 31305, in that it exhibits "innovation in sensitively integrating man-made features into the natural coastal environment." It is anticipated that creatively designed and aesthetically appealing interpretive panels and markers will be unobtrusively placed in various locations describing the cultural history and uses of this waterfront site. Other factors relevant to selection of this project for the Urban Waterfronts Program are discussed immediately below.

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**CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S  
STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) AND OBJECTIVE(S):**

The project is consistent with **Goal 3, Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, in that an interpretive program will promote public access to the waterfront at Fort Mason Center and leverage other funds to accomplish this. The project will emphasize excellence and innovation in design while promoting the protection of cultural and historic resources.

The project is also consistent with **Goal 11, Objective A** of the Conservancy's Strategic Plan, which calls for the provision of recreational facilities such as trails, picnic and staging areas and other public access amenities. A plan to develop an interpretive program at the Fort Mason Center promotes a public access amenity that will encourage recreational use while enhancing the experience of the 1.6 million people currently visiting the site annually.

**CONSISTENCY WITH  
CONSERVANCY'S  
PROJECT SELECTION  
CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:**

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

**Required Criteria**

**Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.

**Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See "Project Financing" section above.

**Support of the public:** The project is supported by Senator Carole Migden and Assemblyman Mark Leno and numerous nonprofit organizations and members of the community. (Exhibit 3: Letters of Support).

**Location:** The Fort Mason Center is a prominent feature on the western shoreline of San Francisco just east of the Golden Gate Bridge.

**Need:** Currently, visitors to Fort Mason Center are unaware of the rich waterfront history of this location. The Conservancy will bridge a crucial gap by providing needed funding to adequately develop a comprehensive interpretive program for this historic site.

**Greater-than-local interest:** As part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area, one of the most attractive and popular urban parks in the country, the Fort Mason Center and the many cultural events staged there draw not only local residents, but visitors from all over the world.

**Additional Criteria**

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**Innovation:** A creative team of professionals, including architect, artists and urban planners, will design the innovative interpretive program for the Fort Mason Center. The most up-to-date techniques for designing and constructing interpretive displays will be used. When completed, the interpretive panels will be placed at key locations throughout the site to gain maximum visibility.

**Leverage:** Conservancy funds will provide less than fifteen percent of project costs. Foundations, private donations, and funds granted by the California State Library provide the remainder.

**Readiness:** The Fort Mason Foundation is ready to begin the planning process immediately.

**Cooperation:** The Fort Mason History project, an endeavor to collect and archive historic documents, photos and memorabilia which stimulated the development of the Fort Mason interpretive program, is a collaborative effort on the part of the Fort Mason Foundation, lessees at the Fort Mason Center, and interested community members. The Fort Mason Foundation will continue to solicit public input during the planning process by holding public meetings and encouraging the participation of the creative community housed at the Fort Mason Center.

**CONSISTENCY WITH SAN FRANCISCO BAY PLAN:**

This project is consistent with the San Francisco Bay Plan Recreation Policies (p.50) Section 5.c which states that “former bayfront military installations designated for waterfront park use should be developed and managed for recreation uses to the maximum practicable extent...” Developing an interpretive program for the Fort Mason Center, a former military base, will encourage recreational use and increase public enjoyment of the waterfront site.

**COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:**

The project is statutorily exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to 14 Cal. Code of Regulations Section 15262, because it involves only feasibility or planning studies for possible future actions, which the Conservancy has not yet approved, adopted, or agreed to fund. Upon Conservancy approval of the project, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.